



*The Reply of the Vestrymen of the Parish of St. Margaret, Westminster, to the Petition which has been presented to the House of Commons, (intituled, A Petition of the Principal Inhabitants of the several Parishes of St. Martin in the Fields, St. Anne, St. James, St. George Hanover-Square, and St. Margaret, within the Liberty of Westminster, in Behalf of themselves and the rest of the Inhabitants of the said respective Parishes) so far as the same Petition affects or relates to the said Parish of St. Margaret, Westminster: Which Reply is humbly offer'd to the Consideration of the Committee to whom the said Petition has been referred.*

**I**N the first place they beg Leave to represent, That the said Parish is the most Ancient of any within the Liberty of *Westminster*; That the Vestry of the said Parish has been a select Vestry Time immemorial; and that during Time immemorial, it has been the custom for the Vestrymen of the said Parish, to elect others out of the Inhabitants of the said Parish, who continue in the said Office so long as they live in the said Parish, and pay the customary Church and Parish Dues, but no longer. That according to the ancient Custom and Usage of the said Parish, the Vestrymen do annually appoint and chuse proper Persons out of the Inhabitants to be Church-Wardens thereof, on the Thursday immediately before *Whitsunday*, who, (when they are out of their Church-Wardenship, and have justly passed their Accounts,) become Vestrymen of course, and take their Seat in Vestry without being elected to that Office.

**T**HAT a true and regular Account is kept, by the Church-Wardens so chosen, of all Moneys by them received and paid for the Use of the Church and Poor whilst in their Office, and Vouchers taken for all Disbursements; which Account, at the end of their Church-Wardenship, (or so soon after as the same can be perfected,) is delivered up to the Vestry, who appoint a Committee of such Vestrymen as have served the said Office to inspect into and examine the same. When the Committee have so done, they report to the Vestry what Arrears are standing out and due to the Parish, and what Ballance is remaining in the Church-Wardens Hands; and then a Day is appointed for Auditing the same, and the Arrears and Ballance ordered to be transferred and paid to the succeeding Church-Wardens, who are accordingly charged therewith, and accountable for the same. When the Account is thus Audited, it is again looked over and perused, by two at least of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, (one whereof being of the *Quorum*) before they allow of and confirm the same; and it is then carefully preserved amongst the Records of the said Parish, to be afterwards referred to as Occasion may require.

**T**HAT the Vestrymen do not concern themselves in choosing the Overseers, as hath been set forth in the said Petition, nor any other Officers or Servants of the Parish whatsoever, except the Church-Wardens, Vestrymen, and the Church Servants, such as the Clerks, Sexton, Bearers, &c. which (as they are a select Vestry) they humbly conceive they have a right to choose, without the Interposition of the rest of the Inhabitants; and also except the appointing the Watchmen and Beadels of the said Parish, who (by Virtue of an Act of Parliament made in the  
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ninth Year of his present Majesty's Reign, intituled, *An Act for better regulating the nightly Watch and Beadels within the Parishes of St. Margaret and St. John the Evangelist, Westminster*) are immediately under the Direction of the Vestrys of the said Parishes; but as to the Overseers, Scavengers, Surveyors of the Highways, and other Parish Officers, the Vestry begs Leave to inform this Committee, that they are annually appointed, nominated, and confirmed, as the Acts of Parliament in those cases severally direct.

WHEN a Person appointed an Overseer has been desirous of paying a Fine to excuse him from serving that Office, it is customary in most Parishes for the Church-Wardens (with the Consent of the Justices) to accept of such Fine, and pay the same to the Overseers, who stand charged therewith in their Account, and apply the same for and towards the Support and Maintenance of the Poor. And this it's presumed is the Reason of the Petitioners complaining, that the Vestrymen have imposed burthensome Offices on some, and excused others for a pecuniary Consideration: but the Falsity of this Charge is manifestly evident, it not being in the Power of the Vestrymen to impose such Offices, nor are they concerned in excusing any Persons therefrom, or in taking such Fines.

THE Parish of *St. John the Evangelist* was taken out of the Parish of *St. Margaret, Westminster*; but there being no perpetual Division made of the said Parish of *St. John's*, according to the Directions of the Statute made in the Tenth Year of the late Queen *Anne*, for Building the Fifty new Churches, all the Rates for both Parishes are (pursuant to the said Act) made and ascertained in the Vestry-Room of the old Parish; for which Purpose, yearly on *Easter Sunday*, publick Notice is given in the Parish Churches of *St. Margaret's* and *St. John's*, and in all the Chapels of *St. Margaret's*, for the Church-Wardens, Overseers of the Poor, and other Inhabitants of the said respective Parishes, to assemble and meet together, on *Easter Tuesday*, in *St. Margaret's Vestry-Room*, for ascertaining the Moneys or Rates to be assess'd within the Limits of the said respective Parishes, for the Relief of the Poor and other Parish-Rates, the Watch-Rate only excepted; which, by Virtue of the Act of Parliament in that Behalf made, is solely under the Direction of the Vestrys of the said Parishes, and is equally and indifferently assessed and rated upon all the Inhabitants of both Parishes.

THAT when the Books are made out and ready for rating, the like Notices are again given in the Churches and Chapels, the Sunday before the Day fixed for rating them for the Church-Wardens, Overseers of the Poor, Scavengers, Surveyors of the Highways, Constables and other Inhabitants of the Parishes, to meet in *St. Margaret's Vestry-Room*, to make and sign the said several Rates, (the Watch-Rate as before excepted:) By which Notices, all the Inhabitants of both Parishes are desired to be present, and pursuant thereto; several of the Inhabitants of each Parish (who are not Vestrymen of either) do usually come to the said Meetings, when the said Rates are ascertained, and at the times the Books are Rating, and do examine and see that the Rates are equally and indifferently assessed, do approve of and sign the said Rates, as will appear by the Ledgers of the said respective Rates for several Years past.

AS to what the Petitioners have asserted in respect to the Partiality of the Vestrymen in collecting and levying the said Rates, by favouring some, and oppressing others; the Vestrymen beg Leave to inform this Committee, That as they have nothing to do with, so they do not concern themselves in collecting or levying either or any of the said Rates; each Rate being collected by its proper Officers, and the Power of levying the same on such of the Inhabitants as refuse the Payment thereof, being given them by his Majesty's Justices of the Peace, on their proper Application and Complaint, to whom they make and yield up an Account of the Moneys by them received on the said several Rates, by which Accounts it will plainly appear that no part of the said Moneys have been illegally applied.

FROM





FROM the Representations aforesaid, the Vestrymen of the said Parish of *St. Margaret Westminster*, humbly conceive they shall be able to make it appear, That the said Vestry is a select Vestry by Prescription, and constant immemorial Usage, and not by wresting the Sense of some Laws, and taking advantage of the Ambiguity of others, as the Petitioners have set forth: That the Church-Wardens thereof are duly and legally appointed, according to the ancient Custom and Usage of the said Parish, and their Accounts opened and justly passed: That the Vestrymen have not assumed to themselves the Power of assessing, levying, and collecting the Parochial Rates, or of electing the Overseers and other Parochial Officers; but that the said Officers are chose according to the Directions of the Statute in that behalf made; and that the said Rates are made with the Approbation and Consent of the Inhabitants, and are equally and indifferently assessed: That as there is no just Cause or real Foundation for any of the Complaints contained in the said Petition, the Vestrymen humbly hope, That this Committee will be of Opinion, that there wants not any Regulation or Alteration in the said Vestry, or Government of the said Parish.

*All which is most humbly submitted, &c.*



THE

# REPLY

Of the Vestrymen of St. Margaret, Westminster, to the  
Petition presented to Parliament against the select  
Vestries.



